



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE LIMITS OF INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL SELF-SACRIFICE.\*

WHAT are the limits of self-sacrifice? How far and on what principle is a man or a nation to give up welfare or existence? I will try first to state the principle of self-sacrifice, I will point out next some prejudices which obscure this principle, and will then show the general mode of its application.

I shall here assume that self-sacrifice can exist and also may be right. And the question is on what principle is self-sacrifice right, and is there a limit at which it becomes wrong? The general principle is perhaps not hard to lay down. To sacrifice one's self is to destroy or diminish one's personal existence, and this by itself is not good. Mere self-destruction, whether partial or complete, is not desirable. Self-sacrifice is right if the loss is sustained with a view to a greater gain, and otherwise it is wrong. We must assume that what I forego is of value, for, if it were worth nothing, it could not be a sacrifice. Supposing, then, that I lose it for something worth no more, my action is not right, and if I lose it for something worth less, my action is wrong and may be immoral. This is the principle, and to this there will perhaps be no objection. The conflict of opinion arises in part from difficulties in the application, but it comes mainly, I think, from the interference of moral prejudices. There are one-sided points of view not subordinated to the governing principle, and we must next proceed to see what these are.

I will begin with the self-styled "Christian" party, who profess to base their morality on the New Testament. But whether it is really more Christian to follow or to ignore the teaching of the Gospels I shall not discuss.

Let us then examine this "Christian" point of view, and

---

\* This paper was written in 1878 or 1879. Apart from abbreviation it has been left much in its original form.

ask if there is here any limit to self-sacrifice. There is no limit whatever. The soul of every man is worth so much that they are all worth the same. They have cost the same price and their value is equal. And there is no end for the individual but to avoid the torment and to gain the bliss both for himself and others, and these two objects emphatically are not two but one. My interest is indivisible from the interest of others, for I can save myself only by seeking to save also my brother. Hence competition disappears; for if I struggled merely for myself, I should lose myself certainly.

This theory is simple, but it is fatally defective. Self-sacrifice seems unlimited, but it really is impossible. A man cannot give up his good where he has no good to give up. The temporal existence which you sacrifice you declare to be worthless; indeed, you naïvely urge that as a reason for sacrificing it. But apart from this existence you sacrifice nothing. What is the living self-development of an individual or nation? What is the beauty and the good of human being? You have made it all dross or stumbling-blocks or means of probation. The end is in the *other* world, and that means it is taken out of this world; and that means that life is worthless or immoral.

Where the self is worth nothing, self-sacrifice is surely impossible. And, again, it is only where no man has any value that all men have equal value. When there is an end and a worth in this world men become unequal, for they must realize the end in different degrees. Hence Christianity in the above sense cannot be reconciled with morality, and let us proceed to examine another false point of view. We may call it the doctrine of one-sided patriotism or national morality.

Worldly existence is here in itself desirable. The life of the individuals in the community, and of the community in the individuals, the development of humanity in the organism of the state is the end. Self-sacrifice of the member is demanded and limited by the good of the body. If the body requires it he develops himself, and if the body requires it he suppresses himself. Thus, self-sacrifice for the good of the state is right, and for any other end is wrong. Outside the state there is no

moral self-sacrifice, because outside there is no good. And there is, of course, no international morality.

But human duties cannot be limited to the sphere of the state. And hence this view, like the "Christian" view, is one-sided and false, nor could either be consistently followed. And yet both creeds to-day own their thoughtless adherents. There is a "Christian" party and a party of "British interests." But the "Christian" politician never asks whether, if war is contrary to the gospel, politics also are not contrary. And the man who denies international right and preaches tribal morality can hardly be consistent. Neither party is in earnest with the principle on which it orders us to act.

But these doctrines are combined and confused in a third view more common than either. I must now examine this, but I confess I do not know what to call it. For the name of "Humanitarian" is too good to be more than lent for the occasion.

The elements which enter into this creed are (1) the idea of personal and national self-development, (2) the doctrine of universal love and self-sacrifice, and (3) the principle of the value of the individual. It may be said to start with the morality of the state, to widen this so as to take in humanity, and to qualify it further by the idea of unlimited self-sacrifice, adding also a notion of the infinite worth and equality of all men. And the practical conclusion is that nations, like men, all have equal rights, that they should all be governed by law, and none selfishly struggle for advantage, and that neither peoples nor individuals may be exterminated, but in any case must be respected.

This creed is identified with much that is noble; but it is inconsistent, deficient, and in part downright false. It approves of self-development, but it condemns self-assertion, the struggle of competition without which there is no development. It extends the range of state morality, but leaves out one factor of that morality, and it transplants others beyond the conditions of their existence. And, borrowing from religion the value of the individual, it seeks to use that value

falsely elsewhere. I will go through these points, and will begin with the worth of the individual.

The equality, or, again, the absolute value of individuals, is not a principle which holds between man and man or nation and nation. On the contrary, the end being the development of human nature, those who have the force and who judge this course to be conducive to the end, may exterminate or make any use of both men and nations. For the end is superior to the individual, and it is right to act for this end to the best of one's judgment. And, if so, the conclusion must follow as above. The end *does* justify the means, and cannot fail to do so, unless either the means are not essential or the end itself not desirable or at least not paramount. But the end we are speaking of here is absolute.

There is a sense in which all men have equal and incomparable value, but this sense falls outside the world of morality. The inner moral values of men may not be comparable, but you cannot from this conclude that they are equal. It is only before God that men become equal, and even thus their equality is but partial. As ideally one with the Divine Will they all are equal, but as diverse functions of that Will they become unequal. Where there is a performance there are degrees, and where men come into relation there is an outward performance which can be compared. And religious equality is here no truth, but has become a superstition.

And leaving these abstract considerations, if we take the case of criminals within or savages without the community, it surely may be right to abolish their existence. The principle we act on no doubt can be misused by the immoral. It can furnish a pretext for blind persecution or selfish aggrandizement. And the progress of humanity being furthered by the diversity of its elements, it is desirable in general that individuals should develop their natures. And this shows a presumption against the extinction or hinderance of man or nation. But it does not prove that in some cases we are not morally bound to accomplish it.

The early Christians were right to insist on the sacredness

of life and on the equality of all men, but for us now these ideas have a subordinate position. To the Christians men were equal because in the other world their value was infinite and in this world nothing. For the development of human nature was not to them desirable. But for us that development is a good thing and an end in itself. And, this being so, we have left the one ground on which individuals are sacred. In getting a *temporal* value they have acquired a *relative* value, and that relative value, measured by the end, may demand their suppression. It thus, for practical purposes, is wrong to maintain the equal or absolute value of individuals unless we are prepared to hold that human nature in itself is worthless. And with this we pass to the remaining elements of "Humanitarianism."

This, we saw, extends national morality to the world. The relations of states are to be those of men in a state; and here we have at once false analogy. This creed, again, ignores the principle of self-assertion which is sanctioned by the state; and here is defective analogy. And, in preaching unlimited self-sacrifice, it runs counter to sound morality.

Beginning with the false analogy, and considering the moral relations of citizens and of states, I will recall some familiar points of difference. In a nation the law is supported by force. There is a sovereign which by its executive carries out the laws and compels the unwilling. But there is no international sovereign now, and there may never be any. And a nation has courts for the settlement of differences, while international courts seem hardly possible. The absence of an executive would make them idle, and this is not all. A national court is presumed morally to represent its citizens. It stands on the common morality of the litigants, and has no selfish interests. But an international tribunal could not be presumed to be always representative or even disinterested. And it is doubtful if international law can be said really to exist.

I shall be told, no doubt, that the absence of a sovereign, and judicature, and executive, makes no difference to our duties. But surely that must depend on what our duties are. Unless we believe in some *a priori* rights of human beings as

such, it is the conditions of our lives which make our duties and rights, and if you remove the conditions the duties are removed. To take men's goods without their consent, we are told for instance, is stealing, and stealing is stealing whether with individuals or nations, and whether you have laws or none. But this is all erroneous. Stealing is an offence against property, but there is no absolute reason why property should exist; and in a communistic state it might not exist. It is in the end the state which decides whether I am to have property, and fixes the conditions on which I am to hold it. And to say that the removal of these circumstances leaves things where they were seems really irrational. Mine is mine, no doubt, and yours is yours; but then, *what* is mine and yours, and how, where there are no laws, can that question be answered? I am not denying here the existence of right between states; but to take the moral rules we find existing between citizens, and, turning these into abstractions, to apply them recklessly everywhere and anywhere, I urge, is indefensible.

Thus we cannot argue in general from civic to international morality, and in particular we cannot transport the duty of self-sacrifice unaltered into the world at large. A man owes a debt to his country, but a nation may feel it owes nothing to some other nation. Duty to one's neighbor remains, but then who is one's neighbor? Within the community he is another representative of the same ideas, and I can believe, when I sacrifice myself, that my life survives in the whole, and that the common spirit gains by my loss. Can a state say this of a neighbor alien in race and alien in ideas? Or may not self-sacrifice bring here no advantage, and but result in fruitless waste?

In such points the analogy from citizens to nations is false. But this analogy, we have now to see, is also deficient. Within the state there is a principle opposed to self-sacrifice; and, reasoning from men to nations, we could not say that self-sacrifice is unlimited, for the self-assertion of the citizen is a moral duty.

The welfare of another, just because it is another's, is not better than mine, and the consequences which would follow

are grossly absurd. Nor is it much less absurd to teach that self-sacrifice should stop nowhere, or that the well-being of any one is as good as that of any one else. Doubtless, the mere fact that he is he and I am I ought to make no difference, and it is foolish indeed in any one to suppose that it could. But if you mean that *the kind of man he is* should make no difference, and that he may not, because of this, get in front of another, you have passed from verbiage to falsehood. The good of the whole is the end, and the competition of the individuals is a means, for if the best do not come to the front there is general loss. And so the community sanctions self-assertion, and it lays down the limits and conditions of self-seeking. You may not kill or steal, but you may struggle against one another for existence. To empty a man's till is forbidden, but to bring him to beggary by competition may often be laudable. "Unto him that hath shall be given" and "reward for merit" are not principles of self-sacrifice, but, within limits, they are principles approved by the state.

And the rule of self-assertion must also hold between nations. Our "Christian" free-traders forbid us to take the goods of a nation by force; but to undersell it in its markets and to drive it out of its trade seems one more illustration of the precepts of the gospel. For "this is not selfish, and it will be better for all in the end. In the pacific contest of free-trade my gain or loss is still one with my neighbor's, and *we* need not raze the commandment 'Thou shalt not covet,' for coveting is impossible."

But even if competition in trade is ultimately for the good of humanity, it is hard to believe that the advantage must come to every man. Men and nations take time to find the better trade they have been compelled to seek. They suffer in the process, and they do not always survive it. And while their competitor is gaining, he surely sometimes must gain what they lose, and after all has sought his own at the expense of his neighbor.

Thus, within limits, self-seeking is desirable among nations, and the question is solely about these limits. It is easy to talk of law, and to assert that war between states is to be



judged like violence within states; but this is merely to fall into the old false analogy. The state sanctions the principle of self-assertion, and qualifies it to suit with civic conditions. But, conditions being different, the principle of competition may have a different range. If a nation narrows that range and excludes itself from foreign commerce, why should it not do so? But if, again, it carries self-assertion beyond the limits allowed in civil life, once more, is this immoral? It may sound fine to say, "Competition is one thing and war is another," but it is not easy to draw a distinction in principle.

Selfishness is not wicked, for the state encourages its citizens to be selfish; and violence is not wicked, for the state is violent towards its citizens. War is not *illegal* violence if there is no law which condemns it, and we might even say that such a law must be founded on war. It is here that our "Humanitarians" make a terrible mistake, for if international law is ever to be real, it must have an executive. But an executive must mean force, and force between nations is war. When a majority have become agreed that on certain points they will compel refractory states, the law of nations will be a reality. And thus, if war goes out, it will surely be by way of war, by an irresistible armed consensus with force in reserve. But what, if so, shall we say to the "Humanitarian" who cries Peace at any price? Shall we answer, There is but one Humanitarian and one friend of peace—the man who is for war in the name of Humanity?

We have found that the equal value of individuals is an illusion, and that the analogy from the citizen to the nation is invalid. The end is general perfection, and for this end, certainly, self-sacrifice may be required. But duties within the state being specially determined, to extend these beyond their conditions is indefensible; for, like other general truths, the general truths of ethics are conditional. And beside this mistake we found also another. The analogy from civil life does not show that self-sacrifice is unlimited, but it shows, on the contrary, that within limits self-assertion is valid.

But our "Christian" party, I suppose, will have a word for us. "You have proved," they may say, "that self-assertion is

recognized by worldly morality, but the morality of the Gospel is the ultimate standard." And on this point I think we should understand one another. If "Christianity" is to mean the taking the Gospels as our rule of life, then we none of us are Christians, and no matter what we say, we all know we ought not to be. If Greek morality was one-sided, that of the New Testament is still more one-sided, for it implies that the development of the individual and the state is worthless. It is not merely that it contemns victory over the forces of nature, that it scorns beauty and despises knowledge, but there is not one of our great moral institutions which it does not ignore or condemn. The rights of property are denied or suspected, the ties of the family are broken, there is no longer any nation or patriotism, and the union of the sexes becomes a second-rate means against sin. Universal love doubtless is a virtue, but tameness and baseness—to turn the cheek to every rascal who smites it, to suffer the robbery of villains and the contumely of the oppressor, to stand by idle when the helpless are violated and the land of one's birth in its death-struggle, and to leave honor and vengeance and justice to God above—are qualities that deserve some other epithet. The morality of the primitive Christians is that of a religious sect; it is homeless, sexless, and nationless. The morality of to-day rests on the family, on property, and the nation. Our duty is to be members of the world we are in; to be in the world and not of it was their type of perfection. The moral chasm between us is, in short, as wide as the intellectual; and if it has been politic to ignore this, I doubt if it is politic any longer. We have lived a long time now the professors of a creed which no one consistently can practise, and which, if practised, would be as immoral as it is unreal.

Self-assertion, we have now seen, is as right as self-sacrifice, and at this point we may notice another mistake. It is no true deduction from Mr. Darwin's views if any one maintains the morality of mere national selfishness. For the mere fact of self-assertion and the acting on the principle of self-assertion are, in the first place, not the same. And, further, in the beginnings of morality among gregarious animals this fact of

self-assertion itself has visibly suffered a change. The struggle of the community against outsiders plainly holds a place by the struggle of the individuals within the community. And how can we consistently set up tribal morality, and a mere struggle between states as ultimate, when within tribal morality the principle of selfishness is not paramount. If there the law of self-assertion has ceased to be supreme, its supremacy, where states are concerned, is the merest assumption. The progress which has limited the struggle of the citizens will limit, we may rather suppose, the struggle of states, and self-assertion will everywhere be reduced to an element in a higher morality.

And here we may take leave of the one-sided ideas we have criticised. The end we take to be the development of human nature. This principle necessitates self-sacrifice, since its way may be through the loss of individuals. And it necessitates self-assertion, since only thus can the end be reached at all. It subordinates both, and their limits can be stated in general. It is possible that a man or a state can develop self best by serving others most, and here the question disappears. Again, a man or state, by giving up private good, may do most for the end; and here self-sacrifice becomes a duty. But if by self-assertion, to the loss or even extinction of others, a man or a state considers that it most profits humanity, there self-sacrifice is immoral.

These truths seem too obvious to require explanation, but they are so constantly misunderstood that I venture to dwell on them. Suppose, first, that we have one single nation; the perfection of human nature within that nation will be the end. The good of each man here for the most part should coincide with that of others, but wholly it cannot and should not coincide. For without competition the community grows effete through the loss of vigorous individuals. The worthless are not pushed aside, and the fittest do not come to the front. And hence, if I am the fittest to have advantage, it is my duty to take it. But on the same principle there are cases where self-sacrifice should be welcomed. Self-sacrifice is an end in general where it results in a greater gain, and it is an end to

the loser so far as he identifies himself with that which gains. But in itself self-sacrifice is an evil, and there is always some presumption against it. To give up life or possessions or talents for the sake of others may be immoral.

And the same thing holds between nations. Each gains generally, but not always, by the gain of all. Some competition, and hence self-assertion to the loss of another may thus at times be right. And at other times, for the sake of humanity, a nation should deny itself. National self-sacrifice, as compared with civic, has a wider object but a narrower exercise. It is hard for a state to judge that its loss is balanced by general gain. And nations differ in value, and there is no organism to insure that loss of one shall advantage the others. The influence of example is weak where public spirit has hardly an existence. And (sophistic as it may sound) the readiness in a nation for self-sacrifice would be an argument in favor of its self-assertion.

The general principle seems plain, but does not carry us far. A nation must aim at the good of mankind and at peace in the end; but, as things are, this principle will in some cases justify violence, and even extermination. For, beside the principle which establishes the end, there can be no absolute law; and the means to this end cannot be fixed beforehand. And such means certainly need not always consist in abstinence from war or even from aggression. Our first hope at present is an international executive enforcing the morality of the best; but, if that is to exist, then the best must agree, and must be the strongest. And strength means war in reserve. We may look beyond this possibly to a better state of things, but the first seems the only road to the second. The meek will *not* inherit the earth, and a nation which claims morality must be ready to use force in defence of right.

It is idle to denounce this view as the trumpeting of a bellicose policy or the glorification of blood and pillage. This view necessitates the belief that a war begun thoughtlessly or selfishly is a crime. It is hostile only to the reckless application of one-sided principles. We remind the party of "British interests" that a cynical self-seeking is immoral, and that

a nation which adopts it may lose one source of strength. To the peace-at-any-price manufacturer we remark that a thing may be worth more than what it fetches in the market; and we say to either the "Christian" politician or the covert Quaker that, while on other points he ignores the teaching of the Gospels, he is a hypocrite if he tries to teach us our duty on this. And we beg the sentimentalist to remember that, after all, force rules the world, and that self-assertion, after all, is a condition of welfare.

It would be a good day if in England we could gain some clearer ideas about selfishness and patriotism; if we could learn to abstain from insincere professions and from sickening cant. We might then, perhaps, remember that, when trade is gone and manufactures perished, the memory of a nation that has strengthened itself and dared to risk something in the cause of humanity, is not so easily lost.

F. H. BRADLEY.

MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD.

---

## WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN THE FAMILY.\*

### I.

I SHALL begin by speaking (1) of the rights of women in the community, and (2) of the claims of the community on women.

These two ideas are reciprocal. There cannot be any well-founded right attaching to any individual, or class, which is not, at the same time, the ground of a legitimate claim, on the part of the community, on that individual or class. To assert a right is to assert a fourfold relation. For a right implies a duty on the part of the person claiming or asserting the right, a duty on the part of the person or persons from whom the right is claimed, and a reciprocal claim, from that person or community, on the person who is the subject of the right.

---

\* A lecture delivered before the East London Ethical Society.